

## TRANSLATION

## Introduction

The phrase, "Good fences make good neighbors," refers to the traditional enmity (or potential for enmity) which exists between persons who share a border. What is true of individuals is true of nations. Ethnic stereotypes and the jokes based on them are one expression of this feeling. The transformation of one's neighbor into the embodiment of evil, as shown below, is another.

The Saracens as Demons in Cretan Legends. By Steph. D. Imellos.

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Numerous tales in which the Saracens are pictured as demons can still be heard in Crete and are sharply engraved in popular memory. In the following article, we shall only use the parts of this abundant material that support indisputable conclusions.

(a) According to one tradition from **Sfakia**, the Saracens are thought to be mysterious spirits, wandering in the darkness "without fear of the crowing of the black rooster. Ironclad, they ride wild and **ironclad** horses and drag heavy chains behind them, frightening people just by the clatter of the heavy chains which threaten to shackle everyone. The people, in order to rid themselves of these frightening spirits, . . . built little, icon-housing structures in the places through which the Saracens used to ride in order to keep them off those routes."

(b) The Saracens' **favorite** places of residence are the fig tree, the "rizimia charakia" [a type of tree found in Crete] (in the shade of which one may not sleep without risk of harm), caves, old houses, old trees, graves, and assorted half-ruined buildings.

(c) According to other beliefs, the Saracens are considered supernatural beings which "are seen in some places during the summer and at noon exhibiting their immense wealth in the sunshine."

(d) Finally, they appear in homes, and the house mistresses "would lay out a separate serving of food and the Saracens would eat it." These demons are called "kalos" or "the kalos of the house" throughout Crete.

In view of the preceding beliefs, we will proceed to the following brief observations:

(a) The horses of the Saracens and the chains which they drag behind them are commonplace themes in many Greek popular traditions about spirits and are not unknown in Crete. It is a widespread belief that spirits in the shape of horses drag chains behind them in order to frighten people. Not only evil spirits, but also spirits of saints (St. Katherine, for instance) appear in this way. Both evil and holy spirits appear for the same purpose--to frighten those who defile their places of worship.

(b) Widespread among the people is the belief that the shade of the fig tree is heavy because this tree is considered a residence of the devil. According to tradition, it is in the shade of fig trees that demons, Neraides, and other spirits hold their meetings or dances; that is why the person who takes refuge under these trees or goes to sleep in their shade is harmed by these spirits. This belief is similar to the Cretan traditions pertaining to the Saracens, and is also found among the Sicilians. The opinion that the

fig tree is unlucky may be due to the popular beliefs (not limited to the Greeks) that, as reported in the Gospel (Matthew 21:19), a fig tree dried up when it was cursed by Christ, and that Judas, after betraying Christ, hanged himself from a fig tree.

The belief about the spirits of rocks, as well as folksongs which refer to them, is Panhellenic. According to widely spread beliefs, caves and many houses, especially the old ones, also constitute residences of evil and adverse demons. The people imagined that demons appear in different shapes in different places.

(c) The belief that the Saracens lay their wealth out in the sun at noon during good weather is a very common one among Greek people. They hold that treasures are buried or hidden in many places and are guarded by spirits or other supernatural beings who usually appear as Negroes.

(d) The demon which appears in a home in the shape of a Saracen is the benefactor or demon-guard of the home and brings it happiness. Whatever shape he takes, he is always respected by the inhabitants and for this reason, food is laid out for him. In this case, the custom may have cult origins, but it is known elsewhere as well. Such traditions about the Saracens, however, are comparatively rare.

From the preceding, we may conclude that the properties and characteristics of many of the demons known in all parts of Greece were transformed unaltered to the Saracen-turned-demon: at some time in Crete, the name "Saracen" replaced the name of another demon of modern Greek mythology.

The Saracens, transformed into demons in Crete because of their bad relations with the inhabitants of the island, were naturally represented as evil in the multitude of relevant traditional tales. However, as the reason for making them demons was forgotten and as the terms "demon" and "Saracen" took on identical meanings, the term "Saracen" also replaced the name of the benefactor demons of the house. This confusion of demons of the modern Greek pantheon, and of the pantheons of any people in general, is not unusual.

The beginning of this process of demonizing the Saracens in Crete has its origin, it seems, in the years when the island was under Arab rule--that is, in the period from its seizure by the Saracens who invaded it from Spain in 826 A.D., until its liberation in 961 A.D. But the fact that these beliefs were so widespread and are still held by the people suggests that the pirates, who for centuries afterwards raided Crete, other islands, and coastal regions of Greece, were also made into demons; in keeping with the old pattern, they also came to be known by the name "Saracens." These pirates, who reached their height of activity after the establishment of bases of operation on the coast of North Africa in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, were identified in Crete and Dodecanese with the "three-eyed ones," man-eating, supernatural giants with three eyes, or, in Cephalonia, with the "one-eyed ones." As far as we know, we do not have any widespread traditions about demonization of the Saracens from other Greek places, except for some instances as in Chios, where there is a site called Saracena (feminine) which got its name "from a Saracen woman who, according to the villagers, was killed there and was transformed into a spirit and now appears during the night."

We find mention of a ghost in the shape of a Saracen quite early in the Byzantine hagiological texts. Thus, in the biography of St. Theognios, bishop of Veteila in Palestine who died in 522 A.D. believed to have been written by Paul Elladikos, the author of biographies of saints in the sixth century mention is made of the appearance during the night to St. Theognios of a spirit in the shape of an armed Saracen, which threatened him. Theognios was frightened, but "an angel appeared right away and said with a very strict voice: 'You seem to me to be a great coward . . . do not be afraid. Because it is not a Saracen as you think, but it is an unclean spirit that has taken the shape of a

Saracen.' Immediately cowardice fled from him, and he partook of bravery and an unspoken joy, and the demon fled."

The Saracens are also called demons (or devils) in the following saying from the Byzantine period: "Seek a Saracen in your house and you will find one wherever you wish." This is followed by a theological interpretation with the usual didactic purpose: "Again, reason talks to the mind and says that if you relax in the bittersweet pleasures of this day, the soul will find Saracens (demons) there, used by the enemy as traps to subdue everyone." According to another ~~version~~ found in a sixteenth century manuscript (currently at the National Library in Athens), the saying goes on as follows: "Saracens are called demons because whenever you wish to go into sin, the demons prosper in your house."

The representation of the Saracens as demons or devils in the above texts should be attributed to a general tendency everywhere to represent hostile people as demons. This tendency has different causes in each case, but certainly one of the main reasons is religious intolerance. Other reasons reinforcing this tendency to mythologize such people have been the conflicts with them and the observation over a long period of time of their customs and morals. According to their observers, these "demonized" people live in immoral fashion, which resulted on the attribution of magical powers to them.

Thus, we learn from a magical papyrus that the Judeans used the names of their enemies--the Levousians, Gergesians, and Ferezians--as names of demons. The same tool place among the people of India and Iran who demonized their enemies. Furthermore, Christians of the Middle Ages considered the Judeans, in turn, to be demons. Among the Romanians, the "dogheaded" are also "man-eaters" and are identified with the barbaric Tartars who used to raid the country. The Greeks, having come into direct contact with various peoples during their long history--~~having~~ clashed with and suffered greatly from them--also mythologized their enemies. Thus, according to folk traditions, black people were demonized everywhere; the Armenians were demonized in Chios and had magical properties attributed to them; in Crete and Cyprus the "Atzoumbades" were demonized because of their ugly and black faces, as were the Saracens. It should be noted that in some places even the Franks were demonized because they were hated by the people, especially in places like Crete and the Cyclades where their presence as conquerors was strongly felt. The "Agarenoi" were demonized as well, but ~~there~~ is very little existing information about them, especially when compared with that about the Saracens in Crete.

The ~~main~~ reason for the demonization of the Saracens obviously was the fear and terror they inspired in the people. As conquerors, they oppressed and tyrannized the people; as pirates raiding the islands and coastal regions of Greece, they proved themselves equally cruel and barbarous, scourges, and evil demons.

The people suffered not only physical oppression from these barbarians, but also religious oppression: the Saracens forced many of them to change to their faith. This religious persecution only reinforced the intolerance of the people--deeply religious and strongly attached to the Christian tradition--towards the barbarians of a different religion, and contributed greatly to the demonization of the Saracen tyrants. We should repeat that the demonization of the Saracens and the attachment of magic properties and arts to them was possibly a result of close and prolonged observation of their morals and customs, something which played a major role in the demonization of the Armenians in Chios. As is known, it is a widespread conception among different peoples that wizards have supernatural powers which they use to harm others. Those who possess such powers may be individuals, families, tribes, and so on, who frequently constitute a whole class of beings beyond normal humans; by inspiring fear in the other group, they are therefore transformed into a demon class by them.

With regards to the Saracens of Crete, we have the testimony of Leon the Diaconos, according to whom "it is said that the Cretans are possessed by wizardry and obscenities and deciets, having taken them over from the Manichaeans and the Mohamet." Leontios Samaras reports the following piece of advice to the son of a "seich": "He should not let him (a Saracen) get in front of him, so that he (the Saracen) might bewitch him and his troops, because the Saracens know a lot of things, and with the craft of astrology they can wipe us off the face of the earth."

Saracena, the location in Chios mentioned above, was so named because, according to one legend, a Saracen **witch** lived there.

The conception of the Saracens as wizards is also illustrated by the use of their name in spells. Thus, a spell for curing a mouth-ache in Lemnos runs as follows:

"Aftiyis, kaftriyis  
A Saracen is chasing you."

Another, from Crete, against rheumatism says:

"The Saracen is sowing, sowing,  
twelve bushels of wheat  
thirteen of barley . . ."

The belief in the magic power of the name "Saracen" is seen in the custom of naming sickly children thus so that they would thrive (Anoyia in Crete).

The people also noticed the atypical **appearance** of the Saracens due to their often dark or black color. Because of this coloring, the word "Saracen" came to mean "black." In Crete, Andros, and perhaps elsewhere, the Saracens, like ghosts, are nowadays considered to be black and ugly and a frightening sight. Indicative of the hatred which the people felt toward this people who oppressed and harmed them is the practice of naming those notorious for their evil and crafty nature "Saracens." In Andros, this name is used concomitantly with those of Judas and Herod by mothers in Syme **when** threatening disobedient children. Additionally, the thorn bush is named Saracen in some villages of Chios.

The Saracens' ugliness was surely the reason why they became scare figures for children. This is indicated by the use in present day Crete of the following threats against children: "The Saracens will eat you"; "The Saracens are coming": "The Saracens will take you and throw you into the sea." If these phrases were not created after the demonization process was completed, then it is easy to see in them the development from scare figures intended to frighten children into demons in general.